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MEMOIR

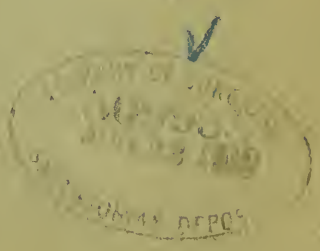
OF

WILLIAM KELBY

LIBRARIAN OF THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BY

JOHN AUSTIN STEVENS



A MEMOIR

OF

WILLIAM KELBY

LIBRARIAN OF THE NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BY

JOHN AUSTIN STEVENS

READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY, NOVEMBER 1, 1898

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MEMOIR OF WILLIAM KELBY

Mr. President, Members of the Society;
Ladies, Gentlemen:

Amid the excitements of this memorable summer, when each day brought with it the stirring news of some national triumph or personal disaster, the members of this Society, scattered in their vacations, were shocked by the sad intelligence of the death of its worthy Librarian, Mr. William Kelby, whose entire life from early manhood had been passed within its precincts and in its service—a service in the exercise of which he was not only familiar to every member of our Society, but to those of kindred institutions throughout the land; a service which is justly held to be deserving of something more than a mere minute on our records. Some memoir of this life and of this service it is my melancholy privilege to submit; a privilege because of my long and intimate association with him in that branch of historic research which was his daily habit—the story of New York City from its early Dutch beginning to its last metropolitan expansion.

William Kelby was born September 12, 1841, at Fortland, a town in County Sligo, Ireland. His father, Thomas Kelby, and his mother, Margaret Mathews, both belonged to what is termed the Englishry of Ireland. The name Kelby is somewhat uncommon. It is derived from the market

town of Kelby, near Sleaford, in Kestevan, Lincolnshire, England. They were both of that so-called Scotch-Irish race which through the last century was a marked factor of the American colonies, and in the breeding of that American race which is now beginning to take a leading part in the shaping of the destiny of the world. The Scotch-Irish, as a distinctive body of people, originated in the migration from Scotland to the north of Ireland in the beginning of the seventeenth century. They settled upon lands confiscated to the English crown during the various rebellions of this turbulent isle. Their home is the Province of Ulster. To this migration was joined one from England, which settled to the south and west of this Province and in the neighboring Province of Connaught, which passed under British rule at the same period. Sligo in Connaught is one of the most important of the seaboard towns. These migrations from England and Scotland held to either the Non-Conformist or the Presbyterian faith. This hardy and independent people, whose life for a century was a continual struggle with their Celtic neighbors, were confirmed in their possessions by Cromwell, and later by William of Orange, as a maintenance and defence of the Protestant religion and of the Protestant succession to the English crown against the Bourbon alliance of the Roman Catholic continental powers. To the dangers of their situation in a bitterly hostile region, not less than to their origin, the Scotch-Irish and the Englishry of Ireland alike owe those traits of independence and tenacity which are their marked characteristics at home and abroad; and which were dominant in the nature and character of our late friend.

While foreign in birth, William Kelby was thoroughly American in training. His parents emigrated to this country, arriving in New York in June, 1842. Their son William was then in his second year. They first settled at Hyde Park, Dutchess County, in this State. Thence they removed to Saratoga Springs, and later crossed the frontier to Canada West. Returning to New York City in July, 1847, they made their permanent home here. Here the father entered into the employment of this Society. And here the son got the beginnings of knowledge in the public schools of the City; the beginnings only, for in fact his acquirements were the result of his own self-directed labors. For he was but sixteen years of age when he was withdrawn from school and entered into the service of this Society, in which his father was then engaged. This was on the 7th of July, 1857, since when, until his death on the 27th of July of the present year, 1898, William Kelby was uninterruptedly engaged in the various services of this institution, and in the arrangement and care of its many treasures. In any measure of the value of these services and of the knowledge required for their proper performance, it must be remembered that the New York Historical Society is not a literary institution only, but a veritable museum of antiquity and an extensive gallery of art. The material care of these departments developed his technical knowledge; and their arrangement, catalogue, and display were the occasion for a constant research over a wide field. The great Abbott collection of Egyptian antiquities, with its sacred bulls, its rich sarcophagi, its scarab ornaments, and its thousand other relics of the days of the Pharaohs,

may be instanced as one of the subjects to which he gave years of study and care. The Mexican and American Indian collections are equally curious, and to us as valuable. The gallery of paintings, particularly rich in its showing of Dutch art, gave opportunity for the acquisition of information and the development of taste in a different, though in part cognate, direction, as historical portraiture is a special feature of this priceless collection, while the paintings in the Bryan department afford study of art in general from its renaissance in Europe. With the help of Dunlap's History of the Fine Arts in America, Mr. Kelby had acquainted himself with the history of painting; and he was familiar with the best examples of our art, from Pratt and Stuart, from Smybert and Malbone, to Baker and Huntington, many of which adorn the walls of this institution, and make known to us, not only the features and costumes of the worthies of old, but the progress of art in this western world.

The purpose of the gentlemen who, under the influence of John Pintard, *clarum et venerabile nomen*, founded this Society was clearly set forth in their address to the public. It was to gather together everything that could in any manner throw light upon the history of New York. Their own efforts, continued during the first quarter of a century, resulted in a collection incomparably rich, and which to-day, when early Americana, printed or manuscript, are priceless, would be impossible of achievement. During the early period this purpose of the Society, thus formulated, was strictly adhered to. Mr. Peter Augustus Jay was urgent in its support, saying: "A file of American newspapers is of far more value to our design than all

the Byzantine Histories." And Mr. Verplanck insisted that the Society should collect every book, pamphlet, chart, map, or newspaper that threw light on the history of the State, its cities, its towns, or the history of its literature. These were Mr. Kelby's fixed views, and this purpose, as originally declared by the founders, was never lost sight of by him.

The newspaper collection begun by Mr. Jay has been a constant source of solicitude both as to its preservation and its increase. Mr. Kelby had it ever in mind as the subject of his early study. He, and perhaps he alone, was aware of its precise condition and of the gaps in its files. It was to him a personal grief that the fine Emmet collection, which would have rounded out our files for the las century, should have passed to the Lenox Library, and be destined to be swallowed up by that leviathan, the new Public Library.

The beginnings of the manuscript collection are also due to the efforts of individuals. To John McKesson we owe the Journals of the Provincial Congress and Convention and of the Committee of Safety. To Robert Fulton, the Gates papers; and here again regret must be expressed that this extensive and varied mass of Revolutionary documents is not completed by the Letter and Order Books of General Gates, preserved by Dr. Emmet, to whom they came by inheritance from his distinguished grandfather, Gates' friend and legal adviser. The Society's collection of manuscripts consists of the Alexander, de Peyster, Duer, Gallatin, Gates, Lamb, Lloyd, McLane, Miller, Osgood, Reed, Steuben, Stevens, and Stirling papers. The Kemble papers, printed by the Society, are

the property of the family. The Thomson, the Lee, and the Deane papers belong to individuals. It was a sorrow of Mr. Kelby that the valuable collection of Livingston manuscripts, which belonged to the late Mr. S. L. M. Barlow, was not secured for our library. There are papers in this collection concerning New York in the Revolution not to be found elsewhere.

While original documents of this character were Mr. Kelby's delight, he, of course, made himself familiar with all the early printed histories of the New Netherlands and of the New York Province—Colden's History of the Five Nations, William Smith's New York prior to 1762, and Thomas Jones's gossipy account of New York in the Revolutionary period, recently published with elaborate notes by our learned associate, Mr. Edward F. de Lancey, under the auspices of the Society, as well as with the later local works of Riker and of Thompson.

But even of printed works his preference was for those which reproduced the documents themselves, or with notes explanatory of the text. Of these, the most important to our New York historians must always be Dr. O'Callaghan's great compilation, the Documentary History of the State, with illustrative calendars. Here we find all the official reports, with their careful detail of the state of the Province in every political or economic feature, to the London Board of Trade or to the Secretary for the Colonies, and minutes of licenses and other minor ordinances which throw a side-light upon the habits of the people. On the completion of this vast work, the Corporation of the City of New York employed Dr. O'Callaghan to edit the City Records,

beginning with the Dutch Records of New Amsterdam, which he had translated and prepared for the press when the exposure of the Tweed methods in city finances stopped further progress; although the reading of proof had begun. These records were later edited by Mr. Fernow, who has patiently followed in the same line of study. They were published in 1897, in seven volumes, under the title of the Records of New Amsterdam, 1653 to 1674. They comprise the minutes of the Court of Burgomeisters and Schepens. The original documents are preserved in the dingy archive-room of the City Hall, where Mr. Kelby passed many an hour, through the courtesy of his friends, Mr. Valentine and Mr. Twomey, who in turn were the respected clerks of the Common Council, and both with something of the taste of the antiquary. Here, from the disorderly and dusty mass, Mr. Kelby culled information in vast variety: the opening of streets and squares; the extension of the water-front, and a thousand details of City life; the water-supply from the old Tea-pump; even the civic feasts of the City fathers, with their accompanying bonfires and public toast-drinkings on such high occasions as Guy Fawkes' Day, the raising of a Liberty Pole, or the reception of a royal Governor at the Province Arms.

With Dr. O'Callaghan Mr. Kelby's relations were most friendly. The old gentleman invariably dropped in at the Library for a chat, and always returned to Albany with some hint or clue to the object of his immediate research. Mr. Fernow, I doubt not, would gladly admit his own obligations in the same line. And here may be noticed the late important contributions to our stock of genealogical information in the Calendar of Wills, 1626–

1836, on record at Albany, published by the Society of Colonial Dames of the State of New York, and compiled by Mr. Fernow; a publication which it is to be hoped may be followed by one similar from our New York Wills.

The wretched manner in which the official documents of our City have been cared for, and their almost entire inaccessibility to the general searcher, have been a matter of painful concern to all of us who take pride in our past. Too practical to complain without suggesting a remedy, Mr. Kelby proposed some years ago the appointment of a Record Commission, to consist of two lawyers and one layman, to serve without salary (he willing to be the lay member), to formulate a plan for the preservation of all the records in the various counties of this State. His plan, in brief, was: the Record Commissioners to be authorized by the Legislature, in their appointment, to communicate with every County Clerk in the State, and to file with the Commissioners a report of the records in their possession. If, as is the case in this County, the Clerk could not make such report, the County Clerk to receive authority from the Commissioners to employ the necessary clerical assistance to make a calendar of every document and record; arranging the manuscript chronologically and sub-alphabetically in bound volumes. And he further proposed that the City should erect a fire-proof building, to be known as the Record Building, in which every document of this County prior to 1850 should be deposited.

Mr. Kelby's immediate aim was to get access to the early colonial documents which are stored, as though they were merchandise, in the lower part of

the present County Court, packed in a heterogeneous mass, as are those also in the brown-stone Court-House in the City Hall Park. At one time he thought the project could be carried out, and it received the endorsement of the legal gentlemen of the City; but no one of them took enough interest in it to draft a bill for the action of the Legislature—rather a sad example of the apathy of the modern lawyer to matters of historic interest. This is certainly not the spirit which animated Jay and Benson and Morris and Verplanck—that spirit to which we owe our existence as a Society.

But while interested in all these various subjects, Mr. Kelby never faltered in his fealty to his life study—the City of New York and its history. The one salient point in his nature was his profound love for New York, his pride in its history, in its growth, in its magnificence. He loved every stone in it, as Johnson or Lamb loved London. He could reconstruct it to his mind's eye at any of the periods of its picturesque existence, with every detail of square and street and building, from the old Bowling Green, the Commons, the Gardens of Vauxhall and the Ranelagh; the Strand, the Maiden and Petticoat Lanes, and the Street of the Beaver, with their buildings of Dutch gables, to the parks, the boulevards, and the towering structures of the modern city; whether when the Dutch clustered about the old Stadt-Huys (strange mixture of tavern and council chamber) and traded on the Bridge, or when the rude palisades at Wall Street divided the city proper from the Outwards, or when the builders of the City Hall in wise economy used sandstone for the rear instead of the marble of the front

structure; no one then supposing that the city would outgrow that limit.

His knowledge of the City as a school-lad began with the new era, that half-century which has just now elapsed since the great Irish exodus after the famine of '48 set the pace for the rapid strides which New York has since taken. What changes in the physical appearance and the domestic economy of the people in this period! Half a century ago the negro enjoyed the monopoly of nearly all the in-door and many of the out-door occupations. Every waiter, every cook and coachman in the private houses or hotels; every barber, bootblack and oysterman, and a large number of the cartmen and the stevedores on the wharves, were of ebony hue—men of pure African race, as the Mulatto were then rare. It is curious to notice how this colored race gradually gave place to the incoming Irish, how they in turn were in great measure supplanted by Germans; and these again have given way to Italian and Asiatic successors—Chinese and Japanese. In those ruder days the streets of the city were the undisputed domain of the boys. Young Kelby became early familiar with every nook and cranny, not only of the immediate neighborhood of his home, but of that older New York into the history of which he was beginning to delve.

Mr. Webster once remarked that the true sources of history are newspapers and letters. They retain the very flavor of the time. In these branches of literature the collection of this Society is especially rich, the file of newspapers of the last century—of the New York *Gazette*, the *Post Boy*, the *Mercury*, the New York *Journal*, and later the *Packet* and

the *Advertiser*—being nearly complete from Bradford's publication, in 1725, to the end of the Colonial period; while its manuscript-room contains a large mass of documents and of letters of infinite variety. These newspapers young Kelby set himself to index by names and subjects, a work which for many years occupied every spare moment of his attendance upon the visitors to the rooms of the Society or the clerical work with which he was charged. No one who has not seen one of the great number of folio sheets of manuscript used in this vast undertaking can realize its colossal proportions. Taking each name and subject in turn, he followed each to the end and beyond the century, through the file of each newspaper in turn. Thus any student following the references made on any given subject may exhaust all the knowledge on that subject to be gotten from the newspapers during that entire period, covering more than one hundred years. It is needless to say that this constant and reiterated study not only made Mr. Kelby familiar with the history of the City in every minute detail, but his manuscript notes enabled him at any moment to refer to the authorities themselves. These notes were his own peculiar property. Information from them he was always ready to impart, and always cheerfully; but that man was *persona grata* indeed to whom he was willing to entrust the manuscript notes themselves. It was my privilege to be allowed to use these notes in the freest manner in a study which occupied some years—the habits and customs of Colonial New York; and I am glad to acknowledge that whatever continuity or precision I attained was due wholly to this as-

sistance. It was by this minute study that Mr. Kelby became early a living cyclopædia of New York information; and for many years before his death he was without question acknowledged to be the highest authority on all that concerns the topography and the history of this City.

While every interval of duty in the rooms of the Society was thus profitably availed of, this was by no means the limit of Mr. Kelby's study. The acquisition of the fine collection of English literature made by the late Dr. Hawkes gave opportunity for a wider range of reading; and as the young man's home was in the building of which he was the custodian, his evenings were usually spent in drinking deep draughts from that well of language pure and undefiled, the English classics. The drama especially interested him. Plays, whether written or acted, were a never-failing joy. Not the sensational drama, but the good old English comedies which then found an interpretation by that admirable school of actors which the Wallacks, father and son, brought together—a band of choice spirits of whom Jefferson is perhaps the last living representative. Of books of travel young Mr. Kelby was especially fond. With every published record of American exploration or adventure he was familiar, and his interest was by no means confined to those of this continent. In these evenings of reading he first made acquaintance with the fascinating reminiscences which have come down to us of social New York; the early quaint relations of Denton, Wooley, Lodwick, Miller, and of Kalm; and later the graphic pages of Duer and Benson introduced him to the New York of the close of the Co-

lonial period; of Miller and Mitchell to that of the first quarter of the century. Those of King and of Francis gave an insight into the manners and customs of the entire first half of this century; while the manuscript of de Simitière opened a window on the time when the site of the present Astor House was a race-course, when the Colonial Dames shopped in Hanover Square, and the Broadway was gay with coaches panelled with the arms of the gentry—the ship of the Livingstons, the burning castle of the Morrisses, the lances of the de Lanceys.

The rooms of this Society have always been the resort of those who have a genuine love for New York. Representative among those, and retaining many of the characteristics of their forefathers, were John Romeyn Brodhead, the learned historian of the New Netherlands; Mr. Gulian C. Verplanck, accomplished gentleman and scholar; the Duyckincks, and the late President of the Society, Mr. Frederic de Peyster. With all of these Mr. Kelby was personally acquainted, and from their lips he learned the rudiments of his knowledge of the inner life of their Holland forefathers; and among his friends he counted Brevoort, de Lancey, Emmet, Andrews, Moreau, and Johnston. He was in close correspondence also with Hildeburn and Stone, of Philadelphia, whose lives were given up to historic labor.

Later it was his good fortune to attract the attention and acquire the friendship of Mr. Richard E. Mount, a stanch friend of the Society. Of an old New York family of English origin, which remained in the City during the interesting period when it was the head-quarters of the British Army,

Mr. Mount was in every sense a typical New Yorker, a fine example of that English race which ruled the New York Province from the day when the doughty Governor Stuyvesant retired from the fort at the Bowling Green to his Bowerie Farm (on which this Society's building now stands) to that day when the British commanders evacuated the City in November, 1783, when New York, passing from her limited Colonial influences, entered upon her metropolitan career. One finds in the history of the City three distinct periods: the Dutch, the English—or, from its mixture of Dutch and English population, it may be called the Knickerbocker—and the third, the strictly American period, when, after the Revolution, the settlement of a large New England population gave it a new and somewhat changed direction. It was the development of this later New York in which Mr. Kelby took an unfailing interest; for while it is true that his studies were, in the main, of the Colonial times, his love was for the New York of the present, and his pride was its increasing prosperity and power. It was the chimera of his hope to combine the history of the old and the new in a colossal work in which the story of every ward of the City should be told, each in a great illustrated quarto, with portraits of the magnates in every sphere of its life and pictures of all the celebrated buildings, old and new—a work which he acknowledged would demand the co-operation of a corps of writers, clerks, and artists, but which he thought, in the increasing magnitude of the city, might be carried out by some great publishing house with honor and profit.

His friend, Mr. Mount, was the last of the suc-

cession of the great law firm of the Alexanders, whose founder, James Alexander, was one of that famous Whig triumvirate which led the Liberty party of the last century—Livingston, Morris, Alexander. As such, Mr. Mount came into the ownership of the old legal library; and it is interesting here to state that the priceless copy of Bradford's edition of the laws of New York, which belonged to James Alexander, came to this Society through the generosity of the Mount family. Of robust habit and fond of out-door life, but like the true New Yorker, always preferring a pavement to green fields, Mr. Mount was familiar with every landmark of the City's history. Much of this had already faded in the lapse of time and the constant evolutions of the City and of every form of its life. It was the delight of the friends to revive the forgotten lore, to separate the quaint truth from its ornament of myth and legend, and to reconstruct the past—not an easy task, when the indifference of the busy and shifting population is held in mind. To this association of interest Mr. Kelby brought the knowledge derived from the study of newspapers and maps, Mr. Mount his family traditions and the results of personal research. Together they explored every point of topographical and local interest of the Dutch and Colonial periods. Even of those thus brought to light but few now remain.

Although I have been a member of the Society from 1848, my own intimacy with Mr. Kelby only began in the year 1867, when engaged in the editing of the Colonial Records of the New York Chamber of Commerce. This work included biographical sketches of every one of the members of that institution,

from 1768 to 1783. It was prepared in the rooms of this Library. As it was in the direct line of that class of research in which Mr. Kelby was engaged, he took the greatest interest in its progress; and it was then that I first became acquainted with the extent and the variety and the minuteness of his information. On my return to the City from some years' residence abroad, this daily companionship was renewed. It was then that Mr. Kelby opened to me his store of countless notes, his indices to the newspaper files, and aroused in me a passion for the Colonial history of our City—a City in which I am proud to say I was born; and through Mr. Kelby I became the daily companion of Mr. Mount, a companionship which ripened into a friendship which was only ended by his death.

Without Mr. Kelby this Library can never be to me personally the same. For me he was its "informing soul." It cannot be otherwise than that this is the feeling of each and all of those who look to this Library as the source of their information. Of these alcoves Mr. Kelby was the "familiar spirit." The classification and arrangement of its books having been made by himself, he was the easy master of its details; and a mere suggestion to him that one was engaged on any special topic of American history was met by a display of volumes covering the entire subject. He had the true bibliographic memory—a topical memory—which knew the nature of books from their juxtaposition, and had an intuitive perception of their contents from their relation; so that he would be quite sure that on such and such shelves, and in such and such bindings, would be found matter relating to the

subject under enquiry, though without always a distinct idea of the particular matter itself; a knowledge, if not of the thing to be found, at least certain as to the place where it was to be found, if at all—a peculiar instinct which only he who has lived among books can understand. He was in every sense a bookman. To the erudition of the librarian, he added the love of books as such, independent of their contents. He revelled in the large paper editions, with their uncut edges, their creamy page, their clean-cut type, and the abundant margin. He loved their outward dress as well as the inner form. It was pleasing to note the physical satisfaction with which he would caress with affectionate touch the soft, warm bindings of choice volumes, and an instruction to watch the careful tenderness with which he would cut the fresh leaves. These are traits which are not always met with even in the most scholarly men.

Mr. Kelby did not become the Librarian of the Society until 1893; but for more than a quarter of a century preceding, although nominally the Assistant Librarian and Custodian of the institution, he was in fact the Librarian. The reasons for this anomaly are easily understood. Married in 1864, he had given hostages to fortune. When Mr. Moore withdrew, in 1876, from this Society, to take charge of Mr. Lenox's collection, the office of Librarian was not only tendered but pressed upon Mr. Kelby; but he had seen the dangers of an elective office, which the post of Librarian is in this institution, while that of Assistant, being dependent on the Board of Trustees, is not subject to elective caprice or intrigue. Each one of the nominal Librarians who suc-

ceeded Mr. Moore was a personal friend of Mr. Kelby, and no one of them would for a moment have thought of interfering in any manner with his technical duties or service. It is fortunate for the institution that in Mr. Robert H. Kelby, the brother of our late friend, now for thirty years in the employ of this Society, the Library is sure of an admirable successor to this office. For years this gentleman has had the training and advice of his brother. He has card-catalogued the entire Library, and is familiar with its arrangement. Without his aid the enquiring historical student would be as much at sea among our alcoves as a sailor without a pilot in a strange port. The routine of the Library is extremely onerous. Although the institution has a General Secretary and a Corresponding Secretary, the duty of reply to the endless requests for information from genealogical and historical students in all parts of the country, though not precisely within his province, falls upon the Librarian ; and this kind of request has enormously increased since the organization of the various patriotic societies which have sprung into existence during the last quarter of a century. The generous gift of a fine collection of genealogies, with a fund for its support and extension, made by Mr. Phœnix, added a new department to the Library, in which Mr. Kelby took a great interest and pride. In addition to this correspondence, there is requisite a constant daily examination of the catalogues of booksellers and book auctioneers at home and abroad. Nothing that was rare touching on American history, and especially on New York history, escaped the expert eye of our late friend ; and such

was the confidence in his judgment that some purse was always open to defray the cost of any purchase he might suggest.

His expert knowledge was well known, and his presence at any auction sale of books was notice of itself that something rare was to be offered. Yet he had self-control enough not to betray his desires, and always acquired the object of his pursuit, unless the price exceeded his limit of value. But he rarely let anything escape him that was needed to stop a gap in our New York titles. He was on terms of intimacy with the noted booksellers, Francis, father and son, and Woodward—as also with our associate member, Sabin, whose knowledge of books is not surpassed by that of any one in this country. He took the greatest pains to complete the collection of Gaine's Almanacs of the Colonial period; and I cannot forget the joy with which he received from me the gift to the Library of a consecutive series of the Revolutionary time—volumes which had been the property of one of the sextons of Old Trinity, and contained some curious burial notes and quaint pencil sketches of the city on the fly-leaves. He also completed the collection of the City directories, from the first issue of 1786 to the present date.

He was ever on the lookout for additions to the map and chart collection, and that of views of the City. The scarcity of early views of New York is a drawback to the student of its local life. The earliest known view is in the possession of this Society. It is an original drawing of New Amsterdam, made by Laurens Hermanz Block on board the ship Lydia, presented to the Society by Mr. Det-

mold. The Burgis engraving of the City in 1717, a large picture, was entirely unknown until 1892, when Mr. Kelby met with a copy, and discovered by comparison that Bakewell's view of 1746 was but a reproduction, with the dates changed, and a dedication to Governor Clinton substituted for the original inscription to Governor Hunter. David Grim's plan of the City, 1743–1744, as well as a view showing the extent of the fires in 1776 and 1778, were drawn by him from recollection. This interesting character lived in the City during the Revolution, and kept the Hessian coffee-house. There is a fine portrait of him in the possession of his family which should be added to our gallery of old New Yorkers. There is still another fine oil painting of New York, with the British shipping in the Harbor, in the possession of Mr. Goldsbrow Banyer, who is also the owner of a curious diary of personal expenditure—an inheritance from the British official whose name he bears.

The earliest maps of the City are those of 1664, known as the Duke's and the Nicoll's map of 1664–1668. Of the engraved maps, the Society has copies of the Bradford map of 1731, the Duyckinck map of 1755, the Montressor map of 1764, and the Ratzer map of 1766. All of these have been of service in the preparation of the new colored ward maps, in which Mr. Kelby personally assisted. The Library has also Robertson's original water-colors of City views made in 1798, Burton's engraved views of 1831, and Peabody's views published in the same year. The view of New York and Brooklyn Heights in 1798, which belonged to the late J. Carson Brevort, was reproduced in one of the City Manuals, where also may be found numer-

ous views and sketches of buildings, and scenes at various periods in our history, from rare originals or engravings.

The centennial of American Independence, in 1876, opened a new field of interest to New York historians. Those of us who had taken interest in the story of the Revolution were painfully aware of the slurs which it has been the fashion of historical writers to cast upon the action of New York and New Yorkers in the long struggle for independence, during the greater part of which it was the misfortune of this City to be the military head-quarters of the British forces. The approach of the centennial of events of which this City and this State were the theatre seemed an occasion to set our New England friends right, and to show them that the Massachusetts colony had neither monopoly of the patriotic spirit of the country, nor yet just claim to priority in resistance to oppression. Already Mr. Dawson, an eccentric man, but a most painstaking searcher after historic truth, had set forth the claim of New York as the first to have drawn or shed blood in open resistance to British oppression. He had shown, in his paper on the Sons of Liberty, that Golden Hill, not far from our City Hall, was in January, 1770, the scene of a bloody struggle between the Sons of Liberty and the Sixteenth Regiment of British Foot, who had wantonly destroyed the Liberty Pole erected on the New York commons to commemorate the repeal of the Stamp Act; while the Boston massacre, a street struggle of the same order, was not till the month of March succeeding. In 1868 the Chamber of Commerce, with which this Society has ever been in close alliance,

celebrated the beginning of the one hundredth year of its existence. On this occasion the claim of New York to have originated the Stamp Act Association of 1765 (the non-importing association), which, participated in by the commercial trading ports of the several colonies, brought about the repeal of the obnoxious legislation, was asserted and proved. Moreover, it was then shown conclusively that the determining cause of the meeting of the first Continental Congress of 1774 was the demand of the Committee of Correspondence of New York for the delegation of a body, not only charged with the framing of acts for the regulation of trade, "but clothed with power to enforce those regulations." The documents on which these claims rest are in the keeping of the Society, as also the files of English newspapers which confirm them. With these Mr. Kelby was familiar, and he took a lively interest in this matter.

In 1876, at the request of this Society, I prepared an elaborate sketch of the Progress of New York in a century—a study which covered several months of labor, in which I was constantly aided by the elaborate notes and the advice of our friend. This paper was printed by the Society, and has taken its place in the line of local sketches already alluded to. I mention this as one of the results of Mr. Kelby's labors. In a word, my relation to the work was that of the advocate who pleads a cause on the brief prepared by the work and research of the attorney in the case.

The centennial of the Revolutionary period began a new phase in Mr. Kelby's career. Up to that period his life had been circumscribed, and his asso

ciations restricted to those brought to him in the daily routine of the library. The celebration of events of which the soil of the City and of the State of New York was the scene directly interested Mr. Kelby, and forced him from his modest retirement into a larger circle of acquaintance. In this new environment, while he retained his native modesty and dislike of personal assertion, he nevertheless took the position to which his attainments entitled him, conducting himself with quiet dignity in this new sphere. But for this experience he would perhaps have never been willing to accept the post of Librarian of the Society, which has always involved some social obligations.

The idea of each and every one of the New York centennials originated in this Society, and the arrangements for them were made here. These included an exhaustive history of each event, and a careful examination of the scene of its occurrence. The first of these was the anniversary of the Battle of Harlem. The precise location and course of this action, in which Knowlton fell, was the subject of a long and animated dispute. The ground was gone over by the committee in charge, together with Mr. John Jay, who was the orator of the day. They were accompanied by Mr. Kelby, and the site definitely established on the Vandewater or Bloomingdale Heights. The rugged point from which the Black Watch sounded defiance across the Hollow way to the Continentals upon the Point of rocks—as Lewis Morris, Jr., relates—was as yet in all its native roughness; and the Harlem Flats which the Heights overlooked, now a compact mass of buildings, were then, September, 1876,

a broad patch of market-gardens, with here and there an isolated farm-house. And, to mark the changes in New York, I may add that a quarter of a century before I had seen the same flats and the adjacent marshes darkened by the clouds of duck and wild fowl as they swept southward in their annual migrations. Mr. Kelby supplied the brief from which Mr. Jay prepared his scholarly address, and later he added an exhaustive appendix to the account of the proceedings published by the Society. The accuracy of the site was again questioned. The cumulative proof brought forward by Mr. Kelby definitely settled the controversy; but, with his usual tenacity, he did not rest content until the correctness of his verdict was clinched by the setting up of a bronze tablet at Columbia University, at the junction of the Boulevard and 117th Street, with an inscription reciting that it was "to commemorate the battle won on that site." This was done at his instance by the Sons of the Revolution. It was somewhere in this neighborhood, Mr. Kelby held, that Knowlton and Leitch fell in the early morning; and here it was that Washington stopped his main advance on the retreat of the British within their lines below the Plains. Mr. Kelby's views as to the place of the "buckwheat field" have been since sustained by Professor Johnston, in his Battle of Harlem Heights. In October of this same year, at the invitation of the Westchester Historical Society and of Mr. Edward F. de Lancey, Mr. Kelby attended the celebration of the Battle of White Plains, of which he had made a careful study.

In September, 1877, the Battle of Bemis Heights, the most important of those contests known as the

Battle of Saratoga, was celebrated by the citizens of Saratoga County on the scene of the action, under the shadow of the trees where Morgan's riflemen turned the tide of contest. On this occasion I had the honor of delivering the historical address, and Mr. Kelby accompanied me to Saratoga. This paper was prepared in these rooms, and Mr. Kelby was my active and efficient assistant in gathering the details; it was later published under the title of the "Burgoyne Campaign."

In 1879 Mr. Kelby was greatly interested in the anniversary of Mad Anthony Wayne's victorious assault of Stony Point, and was a guest on that occasion. Wayne was the grandson of one of the officers of William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne, and Mr. Kelby was proud of him as a representative of the Scotch-Irish race; indeed, the Revolutionary characters for whom he had a special affection were of this stock: James Duane, member of the first Continental Congress and first Mayor of New York after the Revolution, and the two brothers, George and James Clinton, alike distinguished in the council and in the field. The last three of these had in his eyes the additional merit of being New York born. Next to these in his admiration was Alexander McDougall, Scotch born, but whose life was spent in New York; the American Wilkes of the Stamp Act period, he later acquired military fame as a Brigadier-General of the New York line.

In the year 1880 Mr. Kelby was more than ever busy in this favorite field. Tappan was visited, and the precise location of Washington's camp and of the place of André's execution in front of

the lines were definitely settled; and the historical material used by the local committee was furnished by him. In this summer also he visited Pompton, in New Jersey, and travelled that inner road behind the Ramapo Hills screened by which Washington marched and manœuvred his forces from King's Ferry to Morristown. Mr. Kelby's delight in these outings was almost childish in its exuberance. An ardent lover of nature, his enjoyment of this beautiful country was heightened by its historic associations. He had prepared himself for this journey by a careful study of the maps of Erskine and De Witt, priceless possessions of this Society. Erskine was the official geographer of the Continental Army; De Witt succeeded him. On this occasion Mr. Kelby visited the remains of Campbell's famous tavern of the Revolution, and those also of the old Ringwood iron-furnace, the chief source of munition supply to Washington's troops. This furnace was worked by Peter Hasenclever, toward the middle of the last century, for a London company. Robert Erskine came out to take charge of them in 1772. Espousing the American cause, he was appointed geographer to the army. His surveys, 1776–1780, were given to the Society in 1845 by Mr. Richard Varick De Witt. He died in 1780, and a monument was raised to him by Washington's orders at Ringwood. The old residence on the Erskine Manor at the furnace is now the country-seat of Mr. Abram S. Hewitt, whose daughters extended a graceful hospitality to Mr. Kelby and entertained him with a recital of the traditions of the place. According to legend, old Peter Hasenclever lived in high state, dining to the

music of an imported band. The ladies of his family, in satin and brocade, walked the alleys of the well-ordered garden ; and it is said their ghosts walk them now, arrayed, of course, in the self-same satin and brocade, save one, who, in white attire, threads the intricacies of what was once the garden Maze. East Jersey was one blaze of golden apples this year, and the hills were beginning to sport their autumn coat of many colors, much to our friend's delight. Still another series of excursions this year was to the site of the allied camps in Westchester County. Some original French memoirs, with carefully drawn and colored maps of the country, had fallen into our hands, and were the means of re-establishing the position of the opposing forces which confronted each other across the Harlem when Washington disconcerted Sir Henry Clinton by his feint on the defences of New York Island.

In the autumn of 1880 Mr. Kelby was the guest of Mr. Augustus Van Cortlandt at his home, historic Cortlandt House, now maintained as a museum and Colonial depositary in Cortlandt Park. The visit had an historic purpose. Its object was to discover the remains of the friendly Stockbridge Indians, who were massacred by Tarleton's dragoons, in July, 1778, at a point on the old manor which has since retained the name of Indian Bridge. The old sachem chief, Ninham, was later found dead of his wounds in the Cortlandt fields hard by. Some of the wounded took refuge in the houses of the De Voes. The visiting party was accompanied by the well-known antiquary, Mr. Thomas F. De Voe, a descendant of the family. But it was found impossible to locate the precise spot of burial, the

stones by which it had been marked in the Indian field having been scattered or removed in the subsequent changes in the features of the land. The late Mr. De Voe was a constant student in this Library. His Market-Book is full of historic information about old New York. He was a great friend and admirer of Mr. Kelby.

In 1881 Mr. Kelby took a lively interest in the reception of the officers and gentlemen delegated by the French Government to attend the ceremonies of the Yorktown Centennial. With this function the New York Historical Society was but indirectly concerned. The New York courtesies were extended by a commission named by the Governor of the State, of which our honored President, Mr. King, was the chairman. But Mr. Kelby had the satisfaction of exhibiting to the distinguished guests of the nation, and especially to the descendants of the very men who fought at Yorktown, the numerous mementoes of the services of their ancestors which adorn this collection. The representatives of the family of Lafayette were peculiarly interested. The illustrious Marquis was received by this Society in 1824, and sat beneath the portrait, taken of himself in 1784, in the very uniform of the Light Infantry in which he stormed the British works at Yorktown. The portrait was presented to this Society by Colonel Ebenezer Stevens (who served as Lafayette's Chief of Artillery in his expedition against Arnold) for whom the picture was painted.

The centennial anniversaries culminated in that memorable outbreak of patriotic sentiment which marked the celebration of the final evacuation of New York City, November, 1883. The idea of

this celebration originated in this Society. It was carried out by an imposing committee, in which this Society, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Municipal Government of the City were joined, and in which other important institutions participated. The proceedings on this occasion were printed with elaborate historic notes, to which Mr. Kelby made notable contribution. The various localities were visited and the traditions gathered. Among these localities was the old Van Cortlandt manor-house at Croton, the residence of Colonel Philip Van Cortlandt, who commanded a famous New York regiment of Continentals, and who accompanied Washington on his entrance to the City at the time of its evacuation.

Mr. Kelby was most hospitably received. Mrs. Pierre Van Cortlandt on this occasion loaned to him the valuable collection of the Glenn manuscripts, which were hers by inheritance. Colonel Glenn was the Quartermaster-General of the Northern Department during the Revolution. Among these was found a letter of Captain Ten Eyck, written at his post at the mouth of the Tappan Creek, which recited the interview between Washington and Carleton. This interview, at which the arrangements for the evacuation of the city were determined by the two Commanders, took place on board the British man-of-war Greyhound, in the stream. The letter stated that Washington received a salute of seventeen guns—no doubt the first military salute ever given by the British to an American Commander-in-Chief.

The literature pertaining to Evacuation Day had already, in 1870, been gathered by Mr. Kelby, and

published in the Manual of the Common Council for that year. It was later discovered that the official British documents connected with this event, and the manuscript minutes of the negotiations between Washington and Sir Guy Carleton, are preserved in the fifty-six volumes of the papers of the Commanders-in-Chief in America, in the Library of the Royal Institution in London. The officers of this institution kindly answered enquiries as to many points. It was always the hope of Mr. Kelby that he might visit London and examine these and other documents relating to our local history. He was wont to say that in the British archives lay rich nuggets of New York history. It is a wonder that the State of New York has not obtained ere this copies of this material.

The founding of the Society of the Sons of the Revolution was an outcome of this celebration. Its idea had been conceived and formulated in 1875 in these rooms, and its purpose and its limitations discussed and agreed upon with our late friend, who was its first Registrar. He early saw the great advantage that would accrue to historical and genealogical societies from the impulse given by an institution, the conditions of membership in which involved a certain amount of enquiry in each of these lines—a discernment which has been amply justified in the success of this and the numerous societies of kindred spirit and purpose which have been since formed, until now there is not a period of our history which is not represented and its study followed by some special institution.

The centennial of the Constitution of 1789, and of the inauguration of Washington as the first

President under this instrument, was the last of these national celebrations. The Society was amply represented in its many Committees, and Mr. Kelby's knowledge was in constant demand whenever accuracy was required. And this again was the occasion for a Sketch of the City of New York at that period, which was compiled by Mr. Thomas E. V. Smith within these walls, in great measure from Mr. Kelby's material. Mr. Smith's contribution is invaluable to the student.

With the magnificent reception of the descendants of Columbus, in 1893, this Society had no immediate concern. It was especially devised and carried out under the auspices and at the expense of the Chamber of Commerce alone; but I well remember the satisfaction with which Mr. Kelby received the request from the Chamber to name a committee to assist in extending the formal welcome to the great Admiral's representative, a function performed by your honorable President with his usual felicity and grace.

I have endeavored to show that in his pleasures and his tastes, as in his studies and occupations, New York was never forgotten. His walks in the City or its suburbs, his occasional outings in the summer season, were always turned to gain some addition to his topographical knowledge—in the spring to Fort Lee, on the Palisades, where the apple blossoms and lilacs added color and fragrance to the charm of the landscape—in the autumn to the Jersey plains, full of Revolutionary reminiscences. And he carried this passion with him always. The only table-talk which pleased him at the social board was of New York; the only table-

delicacies which won his favor were the product of New York forests, New York fields, or New York waters. Simple in his tastes as he was in his habits, he had the true New York love of fish and shell-fish of all kinds. The glories of the great South Bay, with its inexhaustible supply of ocean products, was a theme which always aroused his enthusiasm. Blue Point oysters fresh from their native beds, and lobsters from the Hell Gate rocks, were his delight; but always at first hand; cold storage was his abhorrence. And these he preferred when served in the open air, at one of the little riverside gardens to be found on the Harlem River or on some of the upper wharves ; and most enjoyed in the company of some kindred spirit, some New Yorker to the manner born. And for his outings a clam-bake at Kingsbridge on the Harlem, at Stamford or Little Neck on the Sound, with the Long Island poet, or on the clear waters of Shinnecock Bay. He loved to dwell on the stories which have come down to us of the turtle feasts of the Colony days, and the massive dinners which Sam Fraunces or Willett served at their taverns, with the invariable accompaniment of punch and madeira, of churchwarden pipes and October ale. In practice, however, he restricted his indulgence to a glass or two of our native product—Catawba or California wine.

His career was marked by ceaseless industry, an unslaking thirst for knowledge, a thoroughness in research, and a precision in the statement of the results of his examination. He cared very little for the opinions or judgments of others on any subjects within the reach of his own study—a trait in which he again showed the characteristics of his race.

His thoroughness in detail is shown in the volumes of the Publications of this Society, compiled and edited by him, and in the ample manner in which they are indexed: the Kemble papers, the Burghers and Freemen of New York, and the New York muster-rolls, 1755 to 1765, the period of the Old French War. In these last titles he exhausted every source of original material, so that they are a model in their line. He also indexed the Deane papers, which were carefully edited by our worthy friend, Mr. Charles Isham, who was at the time Librarian of the Society. And as an Index-maker he had no equal, unless Dr. O'Callaghan, who was a master in this difficult branch of editorial labor. To the third volume of this series he contributed a mass of material on old New York and Trinity Church, drawn from the Colonial newspapers—a curious nucleus of local and family history. And to Valentine's Manual of the Common Council of the City of New York, a heterogeneous mass of valuable local information, he furnished several series of consecutive extracts: the troubles of the Liberty Pole, privateering, etc. In 1876 he contributed to the *Evening Mail* a weekly series of consecutive extracts from the newspapers, printed memoirs, and letters of corresponding date of the last century, giving a daily account of occurrences in the City and of exterior news as received. These were accompanied by an editorial column presenting a digest of the notes. The series ran from March to November, closing with an account of the fall of Fort Washington. In the course of this labor he found occasion to correct many popular errors. It was shown that Washington's New York

City head-quarters during this battle-summer were at the Mortier mansion, later known as Richmond Hill, and that the claim that No. 1 Broadway was ever thus honored could not be sustained ; although it served as barracks, and as a head-quarters of Putnam when in command of the City.

Besides these printed results of his industry and research, he left a manuscript history of the islands in the Harbor of New York, every one of which he had personally visited ; genealogies of the Stuyvesant, Livingston, and Astor families, and copious notes to the inscriptions in Trinity Churchyard, each of which had at some period been subjected to his critical examination ; and also notes on the Hallock and Newton families, made during a summer vacation on Long Island.

With his thorough knowledge of the Colonial period, he could point out the sites of the town residences and of the Island country-seats of the early magnates, and of every person who contributed to the fame and honor of the City. One notable instance of this precise knowledge was his location of the site where William Bradford set up his first printing-press in this Province, in 1693. The Society celebrated this event in 1893, and a bronze tablet marks the spot at No. 81 Pearl Street; a second tablet on the southeast corner of the New York Cotton Exchange designates the place where Bradford printed the first newspaper in the city, the New York *Gazette*, in 1725. A copy of the first year's issue of this paper, missing from our own file, is preserved in the New York Society Library. It seems a pity that such a separation should continue. Another instance of his exactness of investigation

was the proof that Burns' long room, where the non-importation agreement was signed in 1765, was the long assembly-room of the Province Arms. This tavern on the Broadway was then kept by the peripatetic Burns, who had left his Coffee-house, which stood on the site of the later Atlantic Gardens, and which has been erroneously claimed as the scene of this event by authorities well versed in New York matters. And still another and more recent instance was his demonstration, beyond all reasonable doubt, that the patriot spy, Nathan Hale, was captured while attempting to cross the British lines at the Harlem Flats, and certainly that the place of execution was the British artillery park near the old Dove Tavern, at the five-mile stone on the Kingsbridge Road. The exact location Mr. Kelby stated, in his letter published in the New York *Sunday Herald* of November 26, 1893, as west of the Post Road on Third Avenue, between Sixty-sixth and Sixty-seventh Streets.

Mr. Kelby took a great interest in that quaint department of historical literature known as Notes and Queries. He was well acquainted with both the English and American series, and was a generous contributor of hard questions and answers. Abroad the lovers of this succinct style of information have a special organ, but with us it has been merely a department of historical magazines. Scattered through the volumes of the several series of this character may be found his contributions, over either his initials W. K. or his favorite pseudonym "Petersfield," assumed from the location of the Society on the farm of old Governor Peter Stuyvesant, Peter's Field.

I should be ungrateful, indeed, were I to omit to

mention the infinite obligation I was personally under to Mr. Kelby during the six years that I edited the *Magazine of American History*. This magazine, founded by me in 1877, was the outcome of long consideration between Mr. Kelby and myself. At this time he was, indeed, "my companion, my guide, and mine own familiar friend." During the period of my connection with it, he was my constant coadjutor; and the Notes and Queries department was entirely under his direction. This magazine, during the six years referred to, was kept within strictly historical lines. It later drifted into what it was hoped would be more profitable because more popular channels, and met the fate which all special magazines must expect which are tempted to such change of course. Personally, I regret not having delayed the severing of my connection with it until the close of 1883, that I might have completed the printing of the mass of Revolutionary matter which I had gathered—a collection which was at once dispersed, and is now lost sight of. In this regret Mr. Kelby shared, although he very properly maintained his interest in and continued his contributions to the publication which succeeded it.

The career of Mr. Kelby as the Custodian and Librarian of this Society has been my theme; indeed, were I to out-step these limits, I should hardly know when or where to stop in my reminiscences of him. Justice to this theme has necessarily involved an account in some detail of the subjects which were his life interest and his life study. I have dwelt passingly upon his wonderfully retentive memory, by which he held in ready grasp all he had gathered in his wide field of reading and research.

I have mentioned his unflagging industry ; yet with this constant application he was not easily disturbed. His favorite place was in the fore of the Library ; but no matter in what engaged, or how engrossed in his labor, he would always turn aside from his occupation to answer any query or bring down any volume which was asked of him. And such was his power of self-abstraction that these interruptions never interfered with the continuity of his work. Those not practically familiar with the duties of a Librarian can hardly credit the extent of crass ignorance, of even the rudiments of the subjects on which they seek information, which applicants constantly display. Yet even to these he was forbearing, and I fail to remember when he showed either impatience or annoyance in his manner. To this indulgence to the casual enquirer he added, in the case of the genuine student, a friendly interest in the object of his research.

Mr. Kelby, on the 5th of August, 1864, married Margaret Wallace, who was, like himself, of Scotch-Irish extraction. She was of a most gentle and refined nature. She bore him three children : Mary V. and Thomas Kelby, who survived him, and a daughter who died young.

Mr. Kelby died on the 27th of July, 1898, in the fifty-seventh year of his age, and was buried in St. Michael's (Protestant Episcopal) Cemetery, Astoria, Long Island.

I must close, much as I would like to linger on these tender memories of our friend, but not close without some personal tribute to his many admirable traits. With something of womanly softness, he was plain of speech ; his conversation had an

old-time flavor. Domestic in his habits, he was a kind husband, an indulgent father. Of a reserved nature and a quiet composure of manner, rarely ruffled, he was yet of warm feeling; and his attachments, though few, were lasting. Crippled by the narrowness of his early surroundings, it was not till middle life that his really broad nature had room for development.

The pity of his death is that it was at the height of his usefulness. Yet though cut off at the very prime of his intellectual vigor, he had already, by his tireless industry, contributed more to the sum of exact historical knowledge than most of those who have reached life's allotted span. Wherever that knowledge is esteemed and learning respected, wherever faithfulness to the highest order of historic truth is understood and valued, his death will be looked upon as a calamity. To those of us who were within the circle of his conversation and his friendship, it is a personal bereavement; and his memory will be cherished as a personal heritage. Among these it is my privilege to be numbered. We must console ourselves for his loss in the memory of what he was. "We shall not look upon his like again."

In conclusion, I suggest that the painting of a portrait of Mr. Kelby be ordered for the gallery of the Society, with a tablet reciting his service, and as an inscription for it:

WILLIAM KELBY
LIBRARIAN
WHO
FOR FORTY-ONE YEARS FAITHFULLY SERVED
THIS SOCIETY.
1898
"We shall not look upon his like again."

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
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